

Seat of Power: The Afterlife of the Achaemenid Throne on Minted Coinage

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In this article, I argue that the image of the enthroned Achaemenid Great King from the Apadana Audience Relief in Persepolis is incorporated and reused first on the satrapal coinage of the late Achaemenid Empire, then by Alexander the Great and his successor Lysimachus till it enters the iconographic language of Roman Imperial coinage. While the symbolism of the Audience Relief within the Achaemenid Empire has been examined to some extent, direct tracing of the Audience Relief's appearance on coinage from Persia to Rome has not been undertaken. I demonstrate how the iconography of the Achaemenid throne maintains its significance as a symbol of regal authority, even as it shifts from a motif of Achaemenid legitimacy to a sign of a generalized right to rule in Greek and Roman coinage. I also describe the unique physiognomy of the throne itself, whose features are the clearest representation of the Audience Relief's usage. Finally, I demonstrate that the Audience Relief motif's longevity and adaptations became synonymous with ideas of power and right to rule, aspects that numerous subsequent rulers, Persian and non-Persian alike, adopted for themselves.

This article aims to trace the repeated usage of the Achaemenid royal throne on coinage from the Achaemenid through the Roman Empires. While similarities between the coinages of the Persian satraps and Alexander the Great have been previously noted,¹ this is to my knowledge the first attempt at demonstrating the continual presence of the Achaemenid throne on coinage straight through to the reign of Julius Caesar. I will focus on the throne's evolved usage starting in the sixth century BCE with the *Audience Relief* from the Apadana in Persepolis. While not the first such audience scene of its kind, the *Audience Relief* in particular provides us with a centralized message of the role of the Achaemenid king as master of his empire and uses the Achaemenid royal throne as a key facet of that portrayal. This article builds on the monumental work on the art and architecture of the Achaemenid Empire that has already been conducted by the likes of Margaret Cool Root and Margaret Miller by expanding on the message and meaning behind specific Achaemenid motifs and examining how other cultures adopted these motifs for their own use.² I focus on the *Audience Relief*'s abbreviated form and its representation on coinage from the Achaemenid to the Roman Empire, which is signaled primarily by the continued usage of the Achaemenid throne. The location of these objects is given close attention, as is

the *Audience Relief*'s possible modes of transmission between the different cultures of the Mediterranean. It is my goal to demonstrate that this Achaemenid motif, which depicts a particular conception of royal power, was adopted and adapted in the centuries following the Achaemenid Empire. Although the original context and meaning for the motif was undoubtedly no longer fully understood by the time of the Romans, I demonstrate that the imagery was still used to display a sense of regal authority and right to rule.

The Apadana *Audience Relief*

The *Audience Relief* discussed here is not the only example of a king sitting upon a throne; examples of similar constructions can be found in Babylonian and Egyptian art. However, as Root points out, the Apadana's *Audience Relief* is currently the only example of such a motif in monumental form for which we have clear documentation.³ While the *Audience Relief* may not be the precise origin for the coinages being discussed herein, it can certainly be described as a primary source.⁴ While the exact date of the Apadana reliefs is still an ongoing discussion, the general suggested range seems to center around the end of the sixth century BCE.⁵ Achaemenid king Darius I is thought to have designed the



Figure 1. Audience Relief scene, Central Panel. Apadana Palace, Persepolis. Courtesy of livius.org.

sculptural program of the large hypostyle hall known as the Apadana and was possibly responsible for its construction.⁶ The exact date and builder for the Apadana reliefs is not of particular importance to this article, but rather the focus here is on the composition and underlying message of the *Audience Relief*. The Relief itself is located on the North Stairs of the Apadana, which lead to the large audience hall beyond. In the relief, the Great King is depicted larger than life in the central panel.⁷ He is enthroned with his feet resting upon a footstool, while holding a lotus in his left hand and a scepter at a slant in his right. Behind him are the Crown Prince, a Magus, and a weapon-bearer who is thought to be holding the Great King's bow.⁸ The throne and scepter are both important insignia of the Great King, and elsewhere at Persepolis the King is often depicted enthroned with these items.⁹ The left panel (wing A) of the relief depicts the Great King's guards and courtiers, while the right panel (wing B) depicts various embassies from across the Achaemenid Empire bringing tribute to the Great King. These subject peoples are wholly generic representations, differentiated only through their dress or the items they carry. However, these subject peoples appear commonly in Persian relief sculpture, as the variety of subjects within the Achaemenid repertoire was limited consisting of the Great King, attendants, the crown prince, nobles, military figures, and subjects.¹⁰ The sculptural program of Persepolis (and by extension the Apadana Palace) was seemingly designed for non-Persian visitors, "...to convince them not only of their totally subservient position, but that it was the king rather than his god to whom they owed allegiance."¹¹

What is seen in the *Audience Relief* may be an analog for the events that might have taken place in the real audience hall beyond, though perhaps on a more limited scale as it is doubtful that so many different embassies would be at Persepolis at once. Most critical is the underlying message of the sculptural program. The seated image

of the Great King in profile has potential origins in Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, and possibly Mesopotamian art.¹² Farkas notes that while the similar compositions of enthroned kings might be simply coincidental (as there are only a limited number of ways to depict such an image), the fact that the motif was common in neighboring cultures implies it was adopted by the Achaemenids, rather than invented by them independently.¹³ Rather than create such a motif themselves, the Achaemenids seem to have adopted royal iconographic conventions long established in the region, and used them to 'bestow an archaic authority' upon their rule.¹⁴ The overall Achaemenid ideological program focused less on the realities of empire and more on an idealized vision aimed at political persuasion.¹⁵

This idealized vision of rule certainly seems to apply to the *Audience Relief*. Two separate interpretations have been offered for this relief, both of which are plausible, and both of which seek to convey a message of imperial harmony and the rule of the Great King over his subjects. One interpretation suggests that the *Audience Relief* possesses a message of harmonious imperial order richly shaded to suggest a divinely sanctioned and piously applied covenant of rulership.¹⁶ Root has also suggested that the roles of everyone depicted have been raised one level in the hierarchy: the Great King has assumed the status of the focal divinity in the composition, the courtiers become minor deities, and the embassies become suppliants whose gifts take on the value of votive offering,¹⁷ which also fits with Boardman's interpretation that such reliefs were meant to message to non-Persians that they owed allegiance to the Great King above all.¹⁸ Whether this was indeed the intended message of the relief, gift giving does seem to play an important role both in the composition of the work and in Persian culture more broadly. As Miller notes, giving gifts was a crucial element of hospitality within Persian diplomatic exchange, and its inclusion in the *Audience Relief* reinforces

the importance of patronage between the Great King and his subjects.¹⁹ However, it was often the Achaemenid king who did the gift giving, not the subjects, as we see in the *Audience Relief*. This seeming reversal of an essential symbol of hospitality within Persian culture brings us to the second possible interpretation of the *Audience Relief*.

The second interpretation suggests that certain items depicted in the *Audience Relief* correlate to features of a military camp. In particular, Jamzadeh claims that “the presence of the implements of an audience at the camp, that is the stool, the rugs and the men with whips, further stresses the format of an audience euphemizing the brutal conquest” of the subject peoples.²⁰ In this context, it makes more sense that the embassies are seen bringing items to the Great King, and not the other way around. Jamzadeh’s suggestion is that a viewer of the relief would understand that the men in wing A who stood behind the king had a hand in the conquest of the subject peoples depicted in wing B.²¹ I find the second interpretation to be slightly more compelling, the *Audience Relief* contains elements that suggest military conquest, such as the presence of conquerors and the conquered. However, the depiction of the footstool does not occur with any frequency on adaptations of the *Audience Relief*, and is absent on later coinage that adopts the image of the enthroned Great King, implying that this particular image of Achaemenid rule was superfluous to a simplified version of the *Audience Relief*.

Rather, the Achaemenid throne on the *Audience Relief* is one of the most defining features of the scene and is a central element for identifying the reuse of the motif in later contexts, as both a recognizable visual element and a clear expression of regnal power. The throne in the *Audience Relief* is high-backed and rests on a dais. The legs are the main distinguishing feature of the throne, and the design has a fixed, recognizable formula. In fact, this formulaic leg design appears on every depiction of a

Persian royal throne, footstool, or dais, and suggests that the design was ascribed to royalty and possibly signified the dynastic throne. The aspects of this formula are many and complex, so I will only discuss the main identifying features here.²² The primary distinguishing element of the leg design is the series of “rolls” resting upon a lion’s paw.²³ These rolls seem to suggest woodwork, but as Miller notes, “the discovery of thick metal rings at Altintepe [modern Turkey], evidently the projecting ‘rolls’ of the legs, suggests that the furniture should be understood as in origin a metal type, and only in imitation executed in wood.”²⁴ The base of the leg is a short cylinder, above which rests a ‘drooping sepal’ motif, a slightly conical, rounded shape. All of these elements combine to make an easily recognizable form, even on items such as coins which do not depict objects with the greatest of clarity. It is the presence of this throne that allows us to trace the evolution and reuse of the *Audience Relief* through subsequent coinages.

The *Audience Relief* in the Persian Empire

Within its original context, the *Audience Relief* seeks to convey a message of imperial harmony and to reinforce the role of the Great King over his subjects. On a broader level, motifs such as the *Audience Relief* seem to have been disseminated throughout the Achaemenid Empire; however, these motifs were regularly modified and selectively adopted to suit the needs of the locals.²⁵ The contact between Persepolis and the outer reaches of the empire appears to be reciprocal, based on the archaeological evidence that survives. We see a manipulation and revision of the royal iconography in different contexts and mediums, instead of a uniform copying of the official iconographic program, as local officials sought to emulate court models to further their own positions.²⁶ The ability to copy and modify the iconography suggests that the original meaning of the image is so well-known that individuals have room

to modify it slightly. The use of the Great King on one's own commissions (be they coins, rings, wall paintings, etc.) provides the issuer with an understood level of authority, as an extension of the Great King. In particular, the *Audience Relief* from the Apadana is frequently used by elites in the outer portions of the empire to deliberately associate themselves with the ideal of the Great King.²⁷ It is important to note that the exact method of transmission from the Apadana to the outer provinces is unknown, and eventually was likely a



Figure 2. Achaemenid chair leg. Courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society.

situation where copies were being made of other copies, not of the original *Audience Relief*. However the image was transmitted, we find an abbreviated form of the *Audience Relief* from the Apadana in a variety of excavated goods across Asia Minor (see n. 23), and all of them are missing key features of the original *Audience Relief*: gone are the Crown Prince, the attendants, the courtesans of wing A, and the diplomatic envoys and subjects of wing B. We are left only with the foundational image of the seated Great King with his throne, footstool and scepter. This simplified version of the *Audience Relief* is also repeatedly modified by the individuals who adopt and adapt it to fit their needs and is the beginning of the modification and adaptation process that we can follow on coinage through to the Roman Empire. This simplified usage occurs in a variety of Achaemenid media, but I wish to focus in detail on the coinage of several Persian satraps, as it is the clearest example of continual reuse of the *Audience Relief* and the Achaemenid throne that we possess.

The Satrapal Coins

The coins in question were struck in Asia Minor, primarily in Cilicia, and do not resemble the official Archer type coinages of the Achaemenid kings in any way.²⁸ Despite this, it is generally accepted that the minting of satrapal coinage was at least tacitly allowed by the Achaemenid kings.²⁹ This implies that while the Great King was the central authority of the Achaemenid Empire and could mandate official portraiture, Achaemenid coinage relied on more *ad hoc* minting by regional authorities. Satrapal coinages were minted in a wide variety of locations under the authority of numerous local officials, and as such are in no way uniform in terms of iconography, weight, or metal composition. The *Audience Relief* appears on the coinage of three different Persian satraps, all of whom were active in the western Achaemenid Empire in the fourth century BCE. It is possible that this was a regional trend, but given the general lack of Achaemenid coins in



Figure 3. Obverse of Pharnabazus II stater, 370 BCE. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

the archaeological record, it is hard to say whether the *Audience Relief* appeared on satrapal coinages from other areas of the empire. These three satraps, Pharnabazus II, Datames and Mazaeus, all minted stater coins with the image of the deity Baal enthroned on the obverse. On each coin Baal (sometimes referred to as Baaltars, or “Baal of Tarsus”) is enthroned on what is clearly the Achaemenid throne, based on the archetypical legs. All three Baals are dressed in Greek *himatia*, and each holds a staff topped with an eagle. The staff has the same rounded appearance as the scepter of the Great King depicted on the Apadana. The eagle is a new addition to the motif, but as Harrison notes, the staff, eagle and *himation* are all attributes of Baal.³⁰

It is likely that the motif of the enthroned Great King was used as a model for these local coins, as demonstrated by their similarities in composition and accoutrements. However, the Great King’s image was altered dramatically to suit a regional audience that had close, ongoing interactions with Ionian Greeks. The Greek *himation* seems to be a prime indicator of this, as does the presence of the eagle, a bird long associated with Zeus. The positioning of Baal is also reminiscent of Greek sculptural style. The combination of

the frontal view of Baal’s torso and the rest of his body in profile has visible parallels to Zeus on the Athenian Parthenon frieze (see Figure 6), which predates these coins by a century, a connection that demonstrates that the Athenians at least were familiar with Persian iconography (see the section on the *Audience Relief* in Greece, below).³¹ It is worth noting that on that same frieze, Zeus is the only figure depicted on a Persian-style throne, while the other gods are seated on more traditional Greek stools. Kyrieleis argues that Zeus’ seat echoes the Persian-style throne based on the presence of a thin fillet on the legs that creates the curved contours that are easily identifiable in the rolls of the *Audience Relief’s* throne.³² This sort of fillet is found nowhere else in Greek furniture of the period.³³ Considering that the Parthenon was in part constructed as a result of Athens’ victory over Persia in the 5th c. BCE, the inclusion of Achaemenid iconography is an understandable influence, and a way for the Athenians to broadcast conquest of the Persians in their own iconographic language. I do not claim that the Parthenon directly inspired the depiction of Baal on the satrapal coins; rather, the close interaction between the Greeks, the peoples of western Anatolia, and Persepolis



Figure 4. Obverse of Datames stater, no date. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.



Figure 5. Obverse of Mazaeus stater, 361-333 BCE. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

has a noticeable impact on the composition. The design is based off a Persian sculptural depiction of the Great King that has been adopted by several satraps and modified to depict a local Anatolian deity with distinct Greek attributes. We know based on the legend of these coins that this is in fact a representation of Baal of Tarsus,³⁴ but to a Greek eye he appears to be Zeus, and the Persians may have identified him as Ahura Mazda.³⁵ The fact that the design may have represented different deities or ideas to different audiences adds to the complexity of interpretation. However, the use of the *Audience Relief* in regions far from Persepolis suggests that the ideas it conveyed were understandable and useful for a variety of viewers.³⁶

I will briefly discuss the needs of Pharnabazus II, Datames and Mazaeus as satrapal issuers, in order to demonstrate the variety of ways the *Audience Relief* was adapted. The first of the three to issue the seated Baaltars stater type was Pharnabazus II, satrap of Phrygia. Between 378 and 374 BCE, Pharnabazus II was in joint command of preparations for an expedition against Egypt. Despite his role as satrap of Phrygia, his Baaltars coins were minted in Cilicia, most commonly at Tarsus, where the preparations were based. The location of

these mints no doubt influenced Pharnabazus II's choice to place Baal on his coinage. The use of Baal was not a new innovation, but his enthroned position is.³⁷ Pharnabazus II minted large quantities of coinage at Tarsus, so his depiction of the local deity Baal is a straightforward one. In addition, as Bing notes, there were 20,000 Greek mercenaries in the Persian force who would be paid with said coinage.³⁸ The ambiguity of Baal's appearance allowed the Greek mercenaries to associate the divine authority behind the coins with their own god Zeus, not a foreign one, or (perhaps worse) with a foreign king. However, the connection to the Great King is still present in the throne, as well as the overall similarities with the *Audience Relief*. The connection is also supported by the fact that Pharnabazus II was minting these coins as part of his service to the Great King.

Datames, satrap of either Cilicia or Cappadocia,³⁹ assumed sole command of the expedition in 373 BCE, and continued minting Pharnabazus II's coin types until Datames revolted from King Artaxerxes II in ca. 369 or 368 BCE. Datames began minting completely new coin types, which he continued to produce until his death ca. 360 BCE. The obverses still featured the seated Baal, as they were produced in the same Cilician mints. The real change in messaging occurs when viewed in connection with the coin type's reverse. The reverse depicts Datames and the god Ana,⁴⁰ possibly a sky deity that was synonymous with Baal for the Cilicians. Ana points at Datames, who points at himself. The underlying message here is that Datames is attempting to justify his revolt against Artaxerxes II by claiming that he was answering the divine command of Ana (Baal).⁴¹ In this instance, the image of the enthroned Great King, already modified by Pharnabazus II, is further divorced from its original messaging. Instead of using the *Audience Relief* to support his position locally *within* the bounds of the Great King's authority, as was previously done, Datames uses the iconography to support his own position *outside* of the control of Artaxerxes II.

After the death of Datames, Mazaeus was appointed as the next satrap of Cilicia. The obverse of his stater, minted primarily in Tarsus, is almost identical to the Baal on the coins of Datames, in what at first glance appears to be a message of continuity with his predecessor. However, this Baal has rays around his head, which may have been an attempt to associate the 'radiate' Baal of Tarsus with the Persian deity Ahura Mazda.⁴² The reverse, however, depicts the iconographic motif of a lion fighting a bull that is also visible framing the Apadana Audience relief in Persepolis. Bing argues convincingly that Mazaeus' use of the lion and bull motif and the 'radiate' Baal demonstrate Tarsus' close connection with and loyalty to Persepolis.⁴³ Though his obverse is extremely similar in style to that of Datames, the message of Mazaeus' Baaltars stater seems to be one of restoration and return of Tarsus (and Cilicia as a whole) to the imperial fold.

By the mid- to late- fourth century BCE, the image of the Great King sitting on a distinctly Persian throne had been adopted and adapted by officials in western Anatolia for their own personal use. These coins demonstrate the flexibility and multiplicity of meaning in the *Audience Relief*. Pharnabazus II, Datames and Mazaeus all use obverse images that seem to derive directly from the enthroned Great King, but are adapted to suit the needs of the audience for which the coins were minted. Instead of the Persian Great King, all three satraps use the image of the local Cilician god Baal of Tarsus seated on a throne. This may have been aimed at the Cilician people or perhaps Baal was selected because many of the coins minted were produced in Tarsus. In addition, this originally Persian motif depicts a local Cilician god with distinctly Greek features. All three satraps seem to be using the image of the Great King, but couched in such a way that they could appeal to not just the Persians, but to the Cilicians and the Greeks in the region as well. From the outset, the *Audience Relief* served as a model and inspiration for the coinages of the western

Achaemenid Empire, as well as a means of establishing the authority to rule for those who utilized it. However, its central subject, the Great King, is supplanted by local divine figures, making the king of Persia only an allusion, instead of the concrete subject of the coins.

The *Audience Relief* in Greece

While it is difficult to trace the direct pathway of the transmission of Persian iconography to Greece, it seems most likely that mainland Greece encountered Achaemenid imagery either directly through the Persians during the Persian Wars or via contact with Ionian Greeks, who had already incorporated aspects of Achaemenid iconography within their visual culture. At some point, most likely after the failed Persian invasions of the 5th c. BCE, Greek artists seemed to perceive the flexibility of the *Audience Relief*, which "allowed it to be sampled and adapted within local hierarchies."⁴⁴ Travelling sculptors and diplomatic embassies would have been exposed to the *Audience Relief*, which played a central role in the transmission of Achaemenid motifs and concepts to Greece.⁴⁵ This transmission starts before the conquests of Alexander, particularly on Attic pottery of the fifth and fourth century BCE. An Attic red-figure skyphos created c. 450 BCE depicts on one side a Persian seated in a way that possibly suggests a visual echo of the enthroned Great King, while the figure standing on the opposite side bears striking similarities to Achaemenid royal Archer coinage.⁴⁶ A definitive example of the modified Audience relief can be seen on an Attic red-figure *lebes gamikos* from the early fourth century BCE, which depicts a bride seated on a Persian-esque chair. Though she does not hold a scepter or lotus, her arm placement is very similar to that of the Great King, while the position of her body resembles Baal of Tarsus on the coins of Datames and Mazaeus.⁴⁷ These few examples demonstrate the existence of Persian imperial iconography in Attica, if not mainland Greece as a whole. However, the

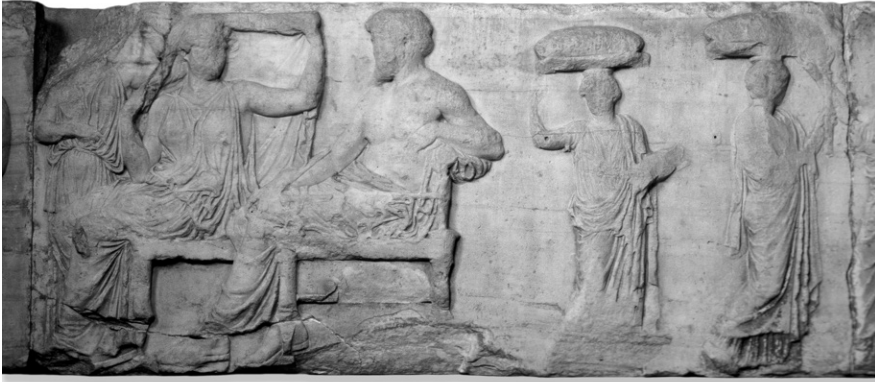


Figure 6. Parthenon Frieze, Block E V. © Trustees of the British Museum.

full adoption of Achaemenid iconography only appears to occur after the campaigns of Alexander the Great. A clear example of this is found in elements of the Parthenon frieze in Athens. We have an example of a Persian royal footstool on the Parthenon, on which a girl is depicted to the right of Zeus carrying a footstool over her outstretched arm. I agree with Thompson, who argues that this was the footstool of Xerxes captured at Plataea. I also concur with Root, who follows Thompson and Boardman, detecting the traces of a lion's paw on the frieze, which would corroborate the stool's identification as a Persian royal footstool.⁴⁸ It appears that at some point the knowledge of the Achaemenid king's association with the footstool entered the visual language of fifth century BCE Athens, allowing it to be depicted on the Parthenon as a direct allusion to Persian military defeat. We see this in the distinctly Persian throne Zeus sits upon, as well as the presence of the footstool being held by an attendant. Root argues that the processional scene on the Parthenon was created as a form of imperial art, and, as such, the Athenians would have looked to the iconography of Persepolis and the Great King as a source of inspiration. She suggests that the Parthenon processional frieze "is a message of imperial aspiration articulated through a festival metaphor borrowed deliberately from the Persians and recast in the guise of an eminently Athenian celebration."⁴⁹ In contrast, Boardman argues that Root's comparison between the

Apadana and the Parthenon is incorrect, based on the premise that there are no physical similarities between the scenes and that the processional frieze on the Parthenon would have been difficult to view from the ground.⁵⁰ It is a mistake to equate the position of the frieze with its importance. After all, the *Audience Relief* at Persepolis was located in a stairway, yet it was clearly reused and adapted by a wide range of individuals across the Persian Empire. It is clear that the iconography of Persepolis had become an active, universal vocabulary for transmitting ideas of regal authority by the fourth century BCE.⁵¹ This connection was further cemented by Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia, creating a definitive path for Persian art and iconography to reach Greece proper.

The Greek Coins

The first adaptation of the *Audience Relief* on Greek coinage occurred under Alexander the Great, who began minting coins similar to those of the Persian satraps after his conquest of Persia. This was most likely intentional, as a way to create a sense of continuity in ruling authority. In *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute*, Plutarch concludes a monologue with 'Alexander' asserting that "it is necessary for me to counterfeit [i.e. render invalid] the current coin and to re-stamp the barbarian world by means of Greek government."⁵² Though this statement is a work of fiction,

the sentiment holds true when examining Alexander the Great's minting program. His lifetime staterers are widely considered to be a masterclass of iconographic blending, incorporating Greek, Egyptian and Persian imagery and concepts in a form of propaganda that was widely understandable to a variety of audiences. Indeed, propaganda was an important secondary component of these coins, though they are primarily meant to function as currency.⁵³ The iconography of Alexander's coins was carefully constructed: as Chamoux states, Alexander the Great was aware of the "... value of propaganda of all kinds, not least the value of myth to solidify his hold on the minds of his subjects."⁵⁴ If Alexander's goal was to capture the attention of his subjects, he succeeded. The iconography of the Alexander III tetradrachm was easily identifiable, comprehensible, and accessible to his diverse subjects, and its universally popular nature ensured its continued use and influence well into the 3rd c. BCE.⁵⁵ This popularity also ensured the adapted transmission of the Great King from the *Audience Relief*.

The obverse of coins struck during Alexander's lifetime depicts a figure who is either Alexander in the guise of Heracles



Figure 7. Reverse of Alexander III tetradrachm, 325–323 BCE. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

or Heracles himself, an identification which remains hotly debated.⁵⁶ In either case, Alexander adopted a distinctly Greek practice of placing a deity on the obverse of his coinage. It is on the reverse that we find the distinctly Persian iconography, when Alexander adopts the image of Baal of Tarsus seen on earlier satrapal coinage. It is generally agreed that this figure is Zeus, not Baal, but the close similarity between the two seated figures makes a definitive distinction difficult.⁵⁷ This may well have been the point: Alexander adapted the coinage of the conquered Persians and introduced a distinctly Greek obverse type, but his reverse retained an image familiar to the Persians, one that was originally derived from the enthroned Great King from the Apadana. A sense of continuity was essential for Alexander's reign. It is perhaps no coincidence that the coins of Alexander depicting the seated Baal/Zeus were minted primarily in Babylon, the satrap of which was the same Mazaeus who issued the seated Baal of Tarsus staters discussed above.⁵⁸ On those satrapal coins, the place of divine authority was given to Baal as an adaptation of the Great King and possibly Ahura Mazda. Alexander takes this image of Baal and converts it into a nearly identical image of Zeus, further continuing the adaptation of the Great King. As the king of the gods and Alexander's ancestor, Zeus was a perfect choice as Alexander's divine protector. Zeus holds a scepter similar to the one Alexander adopted from the Persians, emphasizing Alexander's position as the king of the Persian Empire and reinforcing his divine heritage.⁵⁹ However, instead of placing Zeus on his obverse like the earlier examples of this coin image, Alexander places him on the reverse, giving divine primacy to the Heracles/Alexander portrait on the obverse. As a result, the Great King from the *Audience Relief* is removed even further from his position as the supreme authority in the Achaemenid Empire. His adapted image is moved from its position of primacy to the reverse of Alexander's 'Persian' coinage.

Importantly, the basic meaning of the enthroned Great King still maintains a familiar iconographic message of regal power and authority. This is visible in a further adapted image of the Great King on the coinage of one of Alexander's successors, Lysimachus of Thrace. The obverse of this coin clearly depicts Alexander bareheaded with ram's horns, a clear reference to Alexander's supposed father, Zeus Ammon.⁶⁰ It is Lysimachus' reverse that provides us with the adapted Great King, just as on the coins of Alexander the Great. Here, instead of Zeus or Baal, we see Athena. Lysimachus' depiction of Athena is similar to that of Baal in position, though not necessarily in attributes: she is seated on a throne, wearing a flowing robe, a Corinthian helmet, and her shield depicting a gorgon head leans against her seat, in a style that originated on these coins in 297/6 BCE.⁶¹ The link between Lysimachus and Athena is not discussed in any known primary sources. Given the physical similarities, Lysimachus' Athena was likely inspired by the Zeus on Alexander's tetradrachm, which he in turn adopted from the Persians. Athena replaces Zeus as Lysimachus' divine protector, and her physical resemblance to Zeus means she also literally takes his place. Zeus and Athena are posed in the same manner, both stretching out their right hand in offering (Zeus holds an eagle, and Athena holds a Nike), and both appear to clutch a scepter. The largest difference in the Lysimachus reverse is that Athena is not seated on a distinctly Persian throne, as prior iterations of the Great King always were. Instead, she appears to be on a Greek-style chair. Lysimachus' use of a distinctly Greek seat seems to divorce himself further from the Persian iconography on which the reverse is based. This makes partial sense when we take into account that Lysimachus was originally king of Thrace after Alexander the Great's death, but less sense when we consider that this coin type was minted after he had taken control of Macedonia and Asia Minor. Perhaps Lysimachus was seeking to solidify his powerbase in Greece while also employing a distinctly Persian



Figure 8. Reverse of Lysimachus tetradrachm, 297–281 BCE. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

reverse on his coins. The detail of Athena holding out a Nike towards the coin's legend bearing Lysimachus' name certainly suggests that she is bestowing victory upon him. Regardless, the similar composition of Lysimachus' Athena and the Zeus of Alexander's tetradrachm strongly suggests that Lysimachus' Athena derives from Alexander's Zeus, which in turn can be traced back, through Baal of Tarsus, to the Great King enthroned in the *Audience Relief* of the Apadana.

The *Audience Relief* in the Interim

By the Hellenistic period, the identity of enthroned Great King from the *Audience Relief* seems to have been almost completely phased out in later iterations. Instead, the *Audience Relief* morphed into a depiction of a seated deity (the selection of which seems entirely up to the issuing authority) holding a staff and most often seated on a Persian throne. It seems likely that by this time the knowledge of the enthroned Great King's place within the larger messaging of the *Audience Relief* was not well known. As demonstrated by the coinage of Lysimachus, the seated deity on a Persian throne moved permanently from the obverse to the reverse of subsequent iterations, a distinct downgrade from the Great King's previous position of

absolute authority. The transmission of the *Audience Relief* becomes even more varied in the interim period between Alexander the Great and its appearance on Roman coinage. Beyond Lysimachus' tetradrachms, we have examples of coins from various successor dynasties that either reproduce the seated Baal figure wholesale, or modify the image entirely to suit their needs.

In Egypt, Ptolemy I Soter, the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty, minted a tetradrachm very similar in form to that of Alexander the Great's lifetime coinage; the only difference is found on the obverse, where Alexander is pictured wearing an elephant helm, instead of the lion skin associated with Heracles.⁶² The seated deity seems to disappear almost entirely from Ptolemaic coinage, until it reappears on a tetradrachm minted in 122-120 BCE by Cleopatra Thea of Egypt and her son Antiochus VIII Grypus of Syria, who were co-rulers of the Seleucid Empire.⁶³ Before this tetradrachm was minted in 122-120 BCE, the Selucids already had their own version of the *Audience Relief* coin. Antiochus I Soter's tetradrachm version (280- 261 BCE) depicts Apollo sitting on an *omphalos* on its reverse, an image which echoes the *Audience Relief* in form and function, but, like the coins of Lysimachus, has done away with the distinctive Persian throne.⁶⁴ The same can be said for the Seleucid ruler Antiochus II Theos, whose tetradrachm depicts Heracles on its reverse seated in a manner similar to the *Audience Relief*. However, Heracles is shown here holding a club in his hand instead of a scepter, and he is seated upon what appears to be a pile of rocks and his identifying lion skin.⁶⁵ It is clear that the general motif of the *Audience Relief* continued in the Seleucid Empire, though it appears that most of the time it was sufficient to merely hint at it. The same appears generally true for the Ptolemies, as the seated deity seems to have been phased out altogether after Ptolemy I Soter. However, the tetradrachm minted by Cleopatra Thea and her son Antiochus VII Grypus tells a somewhat different story. This coin depicts mother and son on the obverse



Figure 9. Reverse of Mithradates I drachm, 171–138 BCE. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

in a clear display of equal power, and also resurrects the seated Zeus/Baal iconography from the days of Ptolemy I Soter on the reverse, complete with Persian throne. It is unclear whether Cleopatra Thea and Antiochus VII Grypus knew the origins of the seated Zeus/Baal image that they placed on their reverse. Was it a direct allusion to the *Audience Relief*, or merely a callback to the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty? In a way, the answer is one and the same, whether the issuers knew it. The continual use and modification of the *Audience Relief* through various empires demonstrates the continued understanding of the power and authority the motif transmitted, even if altered. We also see adaptations of the seated Great King beyond the successor kingdoms, on the coinage of the Parthian Empire. Ongoing discussion exists about the identification of the figure on these coins, so I will limit my contribution to this: the reverse image of the coin depicts some seated male deity, likely Apollo, on a *diphros* (stool) or, in later iterations, on an *omphalos*.⁶⁶ The male figure holds a bow, which is thought to be a symbol for the Parthian people. There are

definite visual echoes of the earlier Baal adaptations of the enthroned Great King, though obvious differences exist. Indeed, Parthian scholars seem to be more inclined to attribute the inspiration for these coins to the Seleucids, not the Persians. The similarities between the Parthian Archer and the depiction of Apollo on the coinage of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus I Soter (see above) certainly supports this connection. However, the Seleucid dynasty likely got the seated deity motif from the satrapal coinage of western Anatolia, as part of the numismatic trends that immediately followed Alexander the Great's death.⁶⁷ Overall, despite this loss of identity and shifting of the motif from the obverse of Persian coinage to the reverse of Greek currency, some sense of its significance and message of ruling authority must have survived. These interim examples from the Seleucids, Ptolemies, and the Parthian Empire give us a clear line of continuity for the use of the *Audience Relief's* royal motifs on coinage, implying that the original iconographic design of the *Relief* was never fully lost, though its meaning might have been.

The Roman Coins

Beginning in the late first century BCE, Rome engaged in ongoing conflict with the Parthians, which may have brought it into increasing contact with the remnants of imperial Achaemenid iconography, either through military expeditions or diplomatic embassies.⁶⁸ The Romans were also familiar with the adapted *Audience Relief* in a Greek context, as a result of trade, exchange, and war with the various successor kingdoms. One possible explanation for the two earliest iterations of the enthroned Great King on Roman currency may be related to Roman conquest in the region, and adaptation of local motifs to further that message. This does not necessarily change the iconographic meaning, however, as the original *Audience Relief* in the Apadana has been interpreted as a scene of conquest. The earliest Roman iterations of the enthroned Great King appear to be *RRC 268/1a-b*,

minted in 126 BCE. The moneyer N. Fabius Pictor depicted his grandfather Q. Fabius Pictor on the reverse. Pictor is seated wearing armor, holding an apex in his right hand and a spear in his left and is accompanied by a shield. The message of conquest is still apparent, as Q. Fabius Pictor lived through at least part of the Second Punic War, but the coin is more about honoring the deeds of an ancestor than expressing the importance of a divine authority. The next time we see anything similar to this construction is in 47/46 BCE, when Cato the Younger issued a denarius depicting seated Victory, holding a patera in her right hand and her attribute, the palm branch, in her left.⁶⁹ Unlike Q. Fabius Pictor's coin, Cato the Younger's use of Victory here shows the connection between the personification of Roma on the obverse of the coin with the personification of Victory herself on the reverse. The coin seems to state you cannot have one without the other.

It is not until Caesar that we see a return to the imagery of a patron deity (in this case Venus) on the reverse offering Victory to the man on the obverse. This is due to the aversion towards placing living Romans on



Figure 10. Reverse of L. Aemilius Buca denarius (issued under Julius Caesar), 44 BCE. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

the obverse of coinage, as the only precedent for it in Republican coinage occurred in 196 BCE when T. Quinctius Flaminius placed himself on the reverse of a Greek stater, much to the dismay of the Senate in Rome.⁷⁰ Julius Caesar's later coinages blatantly ignore the precedent of avoiding placing living Romans on coinage; instead, his portrait is an explicit escalation in regnal iconography. Caesar's coinage in 44 BCE marks the forceful return of the Hellenistic association of a ruler on the obverse with a patron god on the reverse. *RRC 480/7b* is the only seated Venus recorded at present among Caesar's coins. Venus is seated facing right, holding a transverse scepter in her left hand and Victory outstretched in her right. This iconographic construction appears directly related to the tetradrachm of Lysimachus of Thrace mentioned above. There is no shield next to this seated Venus, and instead of facing to the left like Athena, she faces right, so that her scepter is in the background instead of the foreground.⁷¹ The most definitively 'Persian' feature of the coin is the distinctive throne, with its clearly recognizable rolls, drooping sepals and lions' feet. Once again, we see a deity seated upon a clearly Persian throne, reaffirming the connection between Caesar's Venus and the Great King of the Apadana. This is not Caesar passively using a Hellenistic iconographic association, but actively and intentionally selecting an image that has a long, clear history of transmitting ideas of kingship, traceable all the way back to the *Audience Relief* in the Apadana, where it is our first extant example of such an audience scene. Caesar's coin type provided subsequent Roman emperors a link to the coinage of Alexander the Great, and through him a link back to the Achaemenid kings, whether conscious or not, as well as a precedent within Roman coinage for this imagery.

Caesar revived the imagery of a patron deity offering blessings that is depicted by Alexander and later Lysimachus, and combined it with his living portrait. While Caesar may not have been actively using

this iconography in the same way as a Hellenistic king, he was at least passively associating himself with kingship by alluding to Alexander the Great. Moreover, the emperors who succeeded him certainly were making an active comparison with Hellenistic rule; they placed their own portraits on the obverse, and depicted some deity seated on the reverse, holding any number of items that directly correlate to that emperor's message. Caesar's *RRC 480/7b* issue directly inspired the iconography of hundreds of coin issues minted by thirty-six of the first forty-four Roman emperors and empresses. The impact of this is astounding: with the exception of eight emperors, most of whom had short reigns, there is an almost unbroken line of this reverse type from the *RRC 480/7b* issue in 44 BCE until the empress Severina (wife of Aurelian), sometime between 270-275 CE, a span of 319 years. Several of Caesar's *denarii* reverses revive the image of a deity offering Victory that we first see on the tetradrachms of Lysimachus (in turn inspired by the coinage of Alexander the Great), but it is the seated Venus that most closely ties to Alexander's issues, establishing a Roman precedent that appears to have remained wildly popular for centuries after Caesar's assassination. The iconographic program of the seated Venus reverse in combination with the living portrait obverse is perhaps one of the most visible influences Caesar had on the Roman emperors, though certainly it was not the only one. Caesar's *RRC 480/7b* coin takes direct inspiration from the coinages of Lysimachus and Alexander the Great, and, by extension, the *Audience Relief*. Moving forward in time, Caesar's denarius becomes the model for those who come after, marking a clear chain of transmission between the *Audience Relief* down through the Roman Empire, not only in terms of iconographic depiction, but also in terms of the underlying message of imperial, divinely ordained rights of rulership.

Conclusion

By tracing the various iterations of the

enthroned Great King on the coinage of later rulers and empires, we get the sense of the pervasiveness and persuasiveness of the fundamental aspects of this iconography. What was first depicted on the north stairway of the Apadana at Persepolis as a clear message about the Great King's power over his subject peoples had farther-reaching impact than its sculptors could have predicted. Originally adopted in the form of the Baal of Tarsus staters of the satraps Pharnabazus II, Datames, and Mazaeus, the *Audience Relief* was then transmitted through the coinage of Mazaeus to the iconographic program of Alexander the Great. Through Alexander and his successors, especially Lysimachus, the form of the Great King continued in the image of enthroned Zeus and the seated deity on Parthian coinage. Its final form was reached in the coinage of Julius Caesar, who adopted the iconography of Alexander the Great but put his own spin on the programmatic messaging. Each iteration of the seated deity, from the Great King to Venus, seems to stem from the idea of conquest and subsequent cultural appropriation. Whether the original meaning of the *Audience Relief* was known to Caesar, its longevity makes it clear that it became synonymous with ideas of power and right to rule, features that numerous subsequent rulers adopted as well.

Endnotes:

- 1 Bellinger 1963; Harrison 1982; Le Rider 2007.
- 2 In particular, see Root 1979; Miller 1997.
- 3 Root 1985, 120.
- 4 Root 1985, 118.
- 5 For in depth discussion of the dating of the Apadana, see Farkas 1974; Root 1988; Nimchuk 2001.
- 6 Farkas 1974; Rubin 2008.
- 7 I hesitate to call the king Darius I, here, as some scholars do, because the image of the Great King seems to have been a more universal, generalized ruler based on the depictions, not a specific individual. The same reasoning applies to my use of the term "Crown Prince" instead of assuming the prince is Xerxes I.
- 8 Root 1985; Garrison and Root 2001; Nimchuk 2002.
- 9 Collins 2012, 393–394.
- 10 Boardman 2000, 142.
- 11 Boardman 2000, 146.
- 12 See Farkas 1974; Boardman 2000; Allen 2005 for further discussion of these parallels.
- 13 Farkas 1974, 56.
- 14 Allen 2005, 44; cf. Root 2002; Andrianou 2006, 222.
- 15 Tucker 2014.
- 16 Root 1985, 113; cf. Rubin 2008, 8; Finn 2011, 222.
- 17 Root 1985, 113; cf. Rubin 2008, 8; Finn 2011, 222.
- 18 See n.11.
- 19 Miller 1997, 127–128.
- 20 Jamzadeh 1991, 80.
- 21 Ibid, 76–77.
- 22 See Jamzadeh (1991) for in-depth discussion of each element of the Achaemenid throne.
- 23 Jamzadeh 1991, 2-3; Boardman 2000, 43.
- 24 Miller 1997, 54.
- 25 In particular, iterations of the Audience Relief appear in several forms of media: on funerary monuments and tombs in Lycia, Caria and Egypt, where private individuals are depicted enthroned like the Great King (Allen 2005, Rubin 2008); on architectural relief sculptures in Cilicia (Miller 1997, 95-96); on seals found in Phrygia and on Fortification sealing 22 (Rubin 2008, 112, Allen 2005, 47); and on similarly composed Persian finger rings (Boardman 2000, 155). For adaptations of the Audience Relief for personal use, see Miller 1997; Rubin 2008. Dusinberre (2003, 10) notes that the cultural impact of the Achaemenids in some areas of the Mediterranean lasted well into the Hellenistic period, which demonstrates that local cultures were actively adopting and incorporating Persian customs into their own, instead of "[...] merely taking on the appearance of foreign traits to curry favor with barbarian despots."
- 26 Allen 2005, 50; Miller 1997, 245–246; Brosius 2011, 143.
- 27 Allen 2005, 62.
- 28 For discussion of the Archer types, see Root 1979; Stronach 1989; Briant 1996; Garrison 2000; Nimchuk 2002; Root 2002; Bodzek 2014. These coins are usually gold, not silver, and present the Great King running on the obverse, holding a scepter and a bow. The reverses usually have a simple punch mark.
- 29 Nimchuk 2002, 63.

- 30 Harrison 1982, 209-210.
 31 Root 1985.
 32 Kyrieleis 1969, 144-6.
 33 Miller 1997, 218-219.
 34 The legend on Mazaeus' stater, for example, reads BLTRZ (Aramaic BLTRZ =Ba'altars).
 35 Harrison 1982, 241.
 36 Bodzek 2014, 67.
 37 Harrison 1982, 209-210.
 38 Bing 1998, 54.
 39 See Bing 1998 for discussion of Datames' satrapy.
 40 For the difficulties in identification of "Ana," see Bing 1998, 59-62.
 41 Bing 1998, 59; cf. Moyses 1986.
 42 Bing 1998, 62. For Ahura Mazda's connection with the sun, see Hdt. 1.131 and Plut. Artax. 29.7.
 43 Bing 1998, 66-69.
 44 Allen 2005, 53.
 45 Root 1985, 118.
 46 Miller 1997, figs. 24-26.
 47 Miller 1997, fig. 75.
 48 Thompson 1956, 290; Root 1985, 107, n. 20; Boardman 1977, 41.
 49 Root 1985, 113; cf. Miller 1997, 218.
 50 For further discussion on the issues of the Parthenon frieze's visibility, see Marconi 2009.
 51 Root 1985, 120; cf. Root 1979.
 52 Plut. De. Alex. 326d (translation is my own): δεῖ καὶ νόμισμα παρακόναι καὶ παραμαράζει τὸ βαρβαρικὸν Ἑλληνικῇ πολιτείᾳ. See also Kurke 1999.
 53 Taylor (1995, 6-7) defines propaganda as "...the deliberate attempt to persuade people to behave in a desired way...what distinguishes propaganda from all other processes of persuasion is the question of intent."
 54 Chamoux 2003, 250.
 55 Proffitt 2016.
 56 Scholars who argue for the identification of the obverse as Alexander (in the guise of Heracles) include: Bieber 1964, 48-49; Pollitt 1986, 25; cf. Bellinger 1963, 13-21; Stewart 1993, 158-159; Thompson 1982, 119.
 57 Le Rider 2007, 11-15.
 58 Harrison 1982, 365.
 59 For discussion of the royal costume Alexander adopted from the Persians, see Collins 2012, 395; Fredricksmeyer 1991, 204.
 60 For a discussion of the literary tradition of the visit to Siwah, see Howe 2013.
 61 Faita 2001, 172.
 62 Ptolemy I Soter, tetradrachm, Alexandria. 17.1 g, 26.5 mm. 317- 311 BCE. Obv.: Head of Alexander wearing elephant scalp. – Rev.: ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ - Zeus seated on throne with eagle and scepter. Ref.: American Numismatic Society 1944.100.35702.
 63 Cleopatra Thea and Antiochus VIII Grypus, tetradrachm, Antioch on the Orontes. 16.44 g, 29 mm. 122-120 BCE. Obv.: Jugate heads of king and queen r. – Rev.: ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΙΑΤΡΑΣ ΘΕΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ - Zeus seated holding nike. Ref.: American Numismatic Society 1944.100.76787.
 64 Antiochus I Soter, tetradrachm, unknown mint. 17.13 g, 28 mm. 280-261 BCE. Obv.: Head of king r. – Rev.: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ - Apollo seated on omphalos holding arrow. Ref.: American Numismatic Society 1948.19.2307.
 65 Antiochus II Theos, tetradrachm, Cyme. 17.13 g, 31 mm. 261-246 BCE. Obv.: Head of king r. – Rev.: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ - Herakles seated holding club. Ref.: American Numismatic Society 1967.152.674.
 66 Eckhel 1828, 544-546, 549-550 argues that the seated figure was meant to represent the reigning monarch, while Wroth 1964 believes the figure is just a seated Parthian warrior. Seltman 1955, 236 proposed the figure was Apollo, a position supported by Raevskii 1977, 83-85 (though Raevskii's conclusions have been disproven by Meyer 2013, 26-28). Lerner 2017, 14 argues that the deity here is a syncretized god who was a fused form of Mithra and Apollo.
 67 For detailed discussion, see in particular Lerner 2017.
 68 Rubin 2008, 105.
 69 RRC 462/1a. Cato the Younger, denarius, Africa. 3.93 g, unknown diameter. 47/46 BCE. Obv.: ROMA M-CATO-PRO-PR - Female bust (possibly Roma) right, hair tied with band. Border of dots. Rev.: VICTRIX - Victory seated right, holding patera in right hand and palm-branch in left hand, over left shoulder. Border of dots. Ref.: American Numismatic Society 1937.158.268.
 70 T. Quinctius Flaminius, stater, Greece. 8.44 g, unknown diameter. 196 BCE. Obv.: Victory standing left, holding wreath in out-stretched hand right and palm-branch in left hand; on left, inscription. – Rev.: Bearded head of T. Quinctius Flaminius r. Ref.: British Museum 1954,1009.1.
 71 The reasons for this switch are unknown, but possibly may be related to the flipped image of Venus. We are seeing her from the opposite side as our other depictions of a seated deity, so while her handedness has not changed, the staff is as a result in the background, not the foreground.

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